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AN
ESSAY
ON THE
NATURE
OF A
CHURCH

Taking it as granted, that the Devil, having first stat-
ted himself an Enemy to
God, did not only necessa-
rily fail in his design, but
was confounded by the Glory; yet not
Annihilated, but Chain'd to Darkness
and reserved for farther Manifestation
of that Glory. It appears, That when
he, by experience found his mistake in

Attacking God in his Intrinsick and Essential Glory; being as Obstinate in Malice, as he was Arrogant in Pride: He hath since pertinaciously Prosecuted his complex Impiety, endeavouring to subvert God's design; of being Glorify'd Extrinsically in his Works, and chiefly in Man, proposing thereby to defeat God in his purpose, since he could not in his essence, and with the same Stone cast, to draw Man (that excellent Piece of the Creation, and perhaps the whole Creation in its diverse Capacities) into the same Condemnation with himself and his Angels.

These who believe are assured of this by the Scriptures, and find how early he begun the Approaches against these Creatures in *Eve* and *Adam*; how boldly and avowedly in the History of *Job*; how subtilly in fallying from the Mouths of the Prophets, &c. under the Livery of Angels of Light.

And these who do not believe, may, by serious consideration, discover so many traces of the Primitive Law of Nature, and with the same Glass discover how Mankind, notwithstanding of the Torch of Natural Light, hath been led, not only out of the Road of Law and

Reason, yea, into the Counter-marches of Impiety and Impurity; and thereby may be convinc'd, that it must be the contrivance, as well as the design of the Enemy of Mans Salvation: So long as Man was staid in no clearer Light, than in the Twilight of Nature, with no other Illuminations than the Torches of Laws, and Lamps of Ceremonies; he confidently impos'd barefac'd Idolatry to the Understanding, and sensual Pleasures to the Appetite.

But knowing the reveal'd design of a future œconomy, wherein there should be a far clearer Light by a Divine Sunshine, and the mind of Man better inform'd than by Natural Light, especially Invitrated Nature; he perceived his former Engines and Methods unadequate for such opposition.

This perhaps did faint his hopes, but sharpened his Malice; for could he pervert the very notions of the Reveal'd Gospel Law; and in place of the Sun bring Man to follow an *Ignis fatuus*, a Will-with-the-Wisp, as Guide of the Course to Heaven, he knew where to harbour them; And tho' the difference of the Sun's Light, and that of an Elf Candle, was in it self Palpable, yet knowing

knowing that the Divulging and Re-
 vealing of this Law, was not to be al-
 ways in a continuation of Miracle, as
 to its outward Conveyance, but the
 Preaching of it intrusted to Man him-
 self, tho' without Warrant, yea, under
 Prohibition to alter one jot thereof;
 could he turn the Belief and Perswa-
 sion of the Truth, from terminating on
 the Divine Revelation, to rely on the
 Human, on *Paul*, or on *Apollo* (tho'
 these were very sure Heralds) he might
 in a short time bring these Ministers
 of the Gospel-Law to do his business;
 and with better success than all his for-
 mer Partisans and Methods; could he
 but get a supposed Christ, or Anointed
 Societies to be placed in Gods Temple,
 his Throne from whence he Promul-
 gates Laws, then he hop'd to draw Man-
 kind by such Coydukes into several
 Traps, at first, and since always by ex-
 positions and applications of Law, diffe-
 rently from the Law-givers plain mean-
 ing; but forcibly imposed by the Au-
 thority and Learning of the Ministers
 of the Law; and then by passing far-
 ther to humane Explanations; then to
 inconsistencies, then to intermix subtle
 notions, embarrassing Devotion, and
 kindling

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kindling contention, inciting Persecution
and Piece-meal overturning Religion,
stealing away the Body of Christ's Do-
ctrine, so as we cannot know where
they have laid it, tho' he did graci-
ously discover himself to the seeking
Murr's: Thus beginning with settling
of Mens Faith on Paul and Apollo, and
thereafter (with less reason) on such as
will needs be their Successors, whether
as a single Heir, or conjunct Admini-
strators, and Executors of the Testa-
ment: Then Purloining the real Estate,
and shuffling into its place, a mysteri-
ous body of Iniquity, wrapt either in
the filthy Rags of Gnostick Impurities,
or in the tinie! Robes of Ecclesiastick
Authority, as were discovered by Paul,
Peter, and Jude, in their Epistles, for
so early did both the Assailants and
Champions of true Religion appear on
the Stage: thereafter they wrapt this
Body of Religion in Clouds of Meta-
physical Notions in Shadows of *ἐκδόσεις*
and *ἐκδόσεις* of *ἡρώων*, and Persons, of the
different Attributions of Generations and
Possessions in the Indivisible Trinity
using boldly what we should use in
most humble Discretion, viz. Ascribing
to God, the Notions of silly Man; and
Arguing

arguing from our Faculties and Operations, to his, as if there were a real Identity, where there is, at most, but a remote Analogy; But no real nor possible Proportion; then in a false Zeal, paying the Tributes due to Infinity, to Finites; by Pigments of Transubstantiation, little amended by Consubstantiation, and thereby removing in many, all Belief of any real, nay nor of Sacramental presence, in the holy Mytery, overthrowing the Mytery by changing it to a Miracle.

Thus founding Factions, they divide Christ's Body, setting up his Goodness and Clemency, against his Will; his Will against his Justice; his Presence against his Power; rendering it impossible for his Power to make a free Agent, or raising a free Agent to act above its Power and Capacity, turning freedom to necessitate Spontaneity; and such Friebs to cast Christians into Confusion. Thus setting God in variance with himself, as far as they can, they do the like in his Image, distracting Man by making his Judgment, his Will, his Appetite, his Rational and Elective Faculties to be acting in opposition to one another, without allowing him to remember.

member, that he is one thing by his Nature; and that his act are acts of the Supposite, or whole Being, and not of this or that Metaphysical Abstraction; And thus raising opposite Sentiments, they support these divisive Imaginations, by Usurpation, and despotick Authority, and this I take to be Satan's chief and main Battery; *viz.* That if he could bring the Teachers to teach these abovemention'd false Notions, and many others as Truths: At first perhaps as Problems, then as Demonstrations, but last and worst, as Divine Truths reveal'd by God, and can he but perswade (which is all one upon the matter) mankind to believe them, as of Divine Veracity, whether as Infalible, or as Undebatable, then he hath opened and secured all the Avenues to the sacred Fort of Religion, rear'd a Mount to transcend its Walls; yea, brought over the Leaders of the Christian Camp, to be Guides to the Enemy, and Managers of the Assault.

It is too sad a Truth, that by these, and the like Proceedings, Fancies are set up for Truths, Images, and Imaginations for Deity, vain Philosophy for pure Theology, Errors for Truths, and

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proud lapsed and vitiate Humanity is set up as God in God's Temple, on the Legislative Throne, and thus Establishing Notions, and new Statutes for Tything of *Mint* and *Annise*, hath shuffled out the Divine and plain Sytem of the Messiah's Gospel; and from these mischievous Principles, as from Fountains have flow'd Schisms, Heresies, Immoralities, Persecutions bording over God's Inheritance, and breach of all Charity in the Church; Wars, Murders, Rapines, Usurpations, Parricides, Violence, Deceits, and Factions in States; and therefore the bringing of Mankind into that true and plain Notions of the Gospel, and discovering the Masqued Face of this Mystery of Iniquity, is the best and greatest act of Charity, the supporting of such Preachers, the best Act of Government; the bringing of the Potentates of the Earth to a voluntar, or necessar consent, of letting the Throne and Power of Antichrist fall, which like a Goblin, hath for so long frighted the Powers of the Earth into their own Slavery and Ruine; would be the truly noblest, and most Heroick act that ever Mortal performed, and will be the forerunning Usher of

of Christ's glorious Kingdom on Earth; Happy and Honourable will he be, for whom so noble a Trophy is reserved.

I desire not to be mistaken, as if I level'd all this at the Roman Hierarchy: No, for albeit, he hath a great Shrine in the Antichristian Kingdom, and is, as it were, the chief Cathedral; yet the Patriarchal, the Diocesan, the Prelatical Monarchies, the Classical Republicks, who Usurp the preserving Rules of Faith in Fundamentals; or raise there Indifferents, and perhaps not intelligible Positions to be necessary, and conditions of Catholick Church Membership, are all under the same View, and under the same Word and Sign with the Enemy, *Nam Crimen quos inquinat, equat.*

In place of all the Equivocks of Religion, I understand it to be a System of the Offices or Duties which Man owes to the Supream Being.

These duties consist (*First*), in the knowledge which we should have of God, and our Conformity to him (*Secondly*), in our knowledge of his Commands, and obedience thereto.

These Duties were founded and result from the relations, wherein God stated Man to himself; and first by Creation.

When he made Man in such a kind of Being. *viz.* an Intelligent Rational Being, indued with the Faculty of a Free-will; he exposed to his mind the Notions of such things as were fit for its Perception, and his own Design; for as such a Being, he was oblig'd to know, and own God as his Creator, Lord, and Benefactor; and therefore to Love him, Fear him, Adore him, and Obey his Will, which obligation was self-evident; in so far, as to impetrate Conformity to his Nature according to Man's Capacity, to Love what he Loved, to Hate what he Hated; at least, all that we perceived Lovely or Hateful to God, from the essential Properties, Self-evident, from the nature of his infinite Perfection; which infinite Perfection, with many of the necessary consequences from it were Self-evident to a perfect rational Mind; and this knowledge of our Relations, to God, and of the Offices resulting from their Relations, are the Edicts of the Law of Nature reveal'd to Man; by that he was Created an Intellectual Rational Being: This is that Primitive Law of Nature groap'd for from other Funds, by which Men were lead into

into many Mistakes as to its Tenor and Extent.

This Knowledge was exposed to the human Mind, mediately by the Senses, or immediately to the Mind it self, as when we know, that we think, or that there are Subjects wherein Accidents are fixt, different from the Accidents; for only the Accidents fall under Sense: yet we know, that Colour, Taste, &c. are in a Subject; albeit we do not know that Subject by Sense: The Accidents of the Substance falling only under Sense, So also we have a Notion of Sense of Understanding, of Will, of Anger, Love, &c. of Thought, of Reason, that is, of Knowledge, by inferring one thing from another, of Spirits, of Secret Influences, and whatever Notions or Idea's we have of any Thing that falls not under Sense, it is exposed to human Minds immediately, and that either by way of Intuition, or by way of Illation; for the Mind Acting to the Objects of Sense, abstracts Notions of general Idea's, from particulars, and then infers one thing from another, either from their Similitudes and Dissimilitudes, their Effects or Properties, and so frames Idea's very different from the Idea's of the particulars

lars, and likewise the Mind frames Abstractions from the Objects, expos'd to it immediately ; for all the Notions or Idea's of humane Minds are framed either from the sensible Species ; or from the Notions immediately exposed to its Perception by their Creator, or by Illation, or Discourse, from these two Kinds of Idea's, and this Trnth cannot be doubted by any who acknowledges that the Devil can tempt Man's Mind, by immediate influencing its Acts, which I presume will not be otherwise explicated than by his immediate exposing the Motives of his Designs, to Mans Perception, Understanding, and Appetite, and if the Devil may, (who made not Man) nor adapted fit Objects for his Acts, much more may God Almighty.

This might have been related in the §. concerning the Mind of Man, but it serves here to explicate what follows on the Subject of this §. to which I return.

God having created Man a perfect Being in that Kind, did expose fit Objects to this Mind, else it could not act, and had been an illusory Creation : These Objects discovered a Being infinitely perfect, who gave Being both

to the Mind, and all its Objects, and thereby discovered a Relation to God, and a natural Law, which oblig'd Man to receive Duties and Offices: The System of this Knowledge, and of Duties consequent to it, was the Law of Nature and the primitive Religion. And Man could not but know from the same primitive Knowledge, that if God should expose new Objects and new Relations and discover his will, as to them, yet man was obliged also thereby.

But Mans perfect State was the first Oeconomy of God, over Man, under the Relation of Creator and preserver; (for they are concomitant) and these Duties can never end, because the Relation is unalterable.

As Man was capable of other new Notions and Idea's, and of knowing other Relations, wherein he stood to God, so by these supervenient Discoveries, tho' the first Oeconomy did still exist and had its due Effects; yet this Addition made a change, and the whole Oeconomy, because a new one.

Under the first Oeconomy, all Mankind were of one and the same Religion; and if they had continued in that State, they had still been of the same Religi-

Religion, albeit perhaps they might have assumed Notions and Offices, superadded to the natural moral Law, or Religion, yet if these Additions were consonant to the Divine Institutions, nay were they not either contrary or derogatory to the primitive Religion: Albeit these Additions might perhaps be assumed by some, and not by others, or different Offices, assumed by several Societies, qualified as is said, yet this does not encroach, nor break off their Unity in Religion, or their being one Church.

Cain might offer the Fruits of Herbs, and *Abel* that of Beasts; and yet both continued in the true Church, had not *Cain's* Immorality, or violation of the Primitive Offices broke him off from acceptance.

This Section is not to prove, but supposes that Man did fall from Perfection, and did fall under another Oeconomy; but yet that they remained still under the Obligations of the Natural unalterable Law.

What were the first Revelations, and new Obligations under this second œconomy is very obscure; but Man having with his Perfection lost the power
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of Performance, it was a sad State, and indeed without hope.

But we find an account of an insinuated Promise of Salvation by the Woman's Seed: We find many of Mankind did continue to hope, and to Perform Religious Offices: We find their Performing of Sacrifices, as expiatory; and whatever grosser Judgments might mistake, yet none of that height of Judgment, as could Institute a Religion, or bring Mankind to Practise it, could be so dull, as to think these gross Sacrifices, Competent or Adequate to satisfy Infinite Wrath and Justice; but only Symbolically, as they did Symbolize a due and adequate Satisfaction; especially since in all Ages, and almost Nations, we find Accounts of the Sense of an Infinite Deity, of Religions, Duties, of Sin, of God's Wrath, and some Preachers of Righteousness: It's not to be doubted but *Job* was of the true Religion, and in the true Church, even tho' perhaps he lived after the Promulgation of *Moses's* Law, and without the Verge of the *Israelitish* Synagogue.

We hear of a Law prescrib'd to *Noah*, and his Race, by an Institution super-added to the Primitive Law of Nature, and the Sacrifices of Religious Worship, Practis'd by *Cain* and *Abel*, evinces there was then, and so early, a reveal'd Religion, which descended to all Mankind, tho' accompany'd with many human Inventions; whereby, generally it was either corrupted, or so vitiate, as to be inverted, and to be transchang'd into God's Honour.

Providence hath only preserved some dark Lineaments of the Religions of these times, and so intermixt with Profaneness and Impieties, as demonstrates, they were a System of foolish, filthy, or devilish Inventions, whereby those united in that Profession, could neither be of the Religion, nor of the true Church, and yet we never find any Catholick Judge Commissionated or Instituted, over all that Church, who had Power to Make or Alter, Punish or Correct Transgressors, as a Catholick head, either in one, or many Persons.

In that dark œconomy, particular Judges, we heard of many; but who did rather Assume, than receive any such Commission; except only that System of
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the *Israelitish* Religion, which appears in its whole, not only consistent with the Primitive Natural Religion, but consonant to it, retaining all that the Natural Law Commanded, and superadding nothing but what was agreeable and explanatory of it, accompany'd with that reverence and decorum, which was suitable; and this is one strong evidence that it was of God's Prescription, and not of humane Invention; and as it was Instituted for a peculiar People, and its Profelytes, so it did not exclude others to whom it was not Prescrib'd, from the Unity of true Religion, *viz.* of the Primitive Natural Religion; for (as is said) were *Job* and his Friends in Life after the Institution of the *Jews* Religion; tho' they were not, not were not oblig'd to be of that Synagogue; yet not the less, they and the *Jews* were both of the true Religion, and in the true Church.

And albeit, they were not oblig'd to joyn with the *Jews* in the superadded Prescriptions, and Modes of Worship; yet the *Jews* were still oblig'd in Union with them in the Primitive Natural Religion, and in the Communion thereof; and if had pleased God to Institute another

another Form, and superadd other Prescriptions to another People, these also would be oblig'd to these super-added Revelations, but the *Jews* would not, and yet both continue still in their Union and Communion of true Religion. The Jewish Oeconomy was perfect in its Kind, as a particular, not as a Catholick Church; but being only particular and narrow, was very fitly put under one Government and Jurisdiction, extending to it self to all in its Oeconomy, but not exclusively, for other (if Prescrib'd by God) had, no doubt, been such also; and it appears from its Nature, that it look'd, and pointed out a more perfect Oeconomy, which was to be revealed and prescrib'd, and was foretold, and that gives now a proof demonstrative of Jesus being God, Man, Born, &c.

And this was that of Christ's Gospel, who came as foretold by Prophets, in the power of Omnipotency, demonstrating himself to be God, as such, and he gave and reveal'd a new Law; and yet not a new Law, but rather a Perfection of the first, and an Implement of all the Symbols of the Intermediate.

This Law, as it concern'd all Mankind, so if Reveal'd, it was to be believ'd, and binding all to whom it was Reveal'd, and to the Belief and Obedience thereof, under the pain of being Obnoxious to eternal Wrath.

The obligation to believe, and to obey, is founded in the Primitive Law of Nature, because it is Reveal'd, and Commanded by God; and if the not discerning it to be God's Truth and Law, by reason of Mans blindness who cannot perceive the Light, tho' it shine, that blindness can give no excuse.

I am not now to determine what is the case of those, to whom the new Oeconomy was never Reveal'd; for since to Man in perfect Nature it was not Reveal'd, nor could be known without Revelation; this Ignorance is not of Man's self; but if Reveal'd, the Obligation emerges, nor can we on any ground fancy any Obligation on God, either to grant a Redemption, or to Reveal it to all; or to give a special supernatural Grace to any, drawing them to Belief, or Obedience; but on the other hand, God may grant such Grace in free Love; and it is an exceeding Mercy to those on whom it's conferr'd.

All Mankind' in the State of Perfection, and so long as they continu'd in it, were in, and would be in the Unity of true Religion, and all would have been and continu'd in the Holy Catholick Church.

If in the second Oeconomy which succeeded the perfect State; all who believ'd, what God of new Revealed, in that Oeconomy, and obey'd the Commands therein prescribed; all these were United in the true Religion: And albeit in all the duration of that Oeconomy, God was pleased to give peculiar Revelations and Commands, Superadding new Commands to the Jews; yet that did not hinder but that these who kept in the Practice and Belief of the second Oeconomy, were still in the Unity of the true Religion; even with the Jews; although not in that Synagogue or Society; for we must conclude, That as nothing in the second System, was contrary to the first primitive Religion; so nothing in the Jews peculiar tho' enlarged System, was contrary either to the first or Second; for at all Time and among all Nations, These who fear God and work Righteousness are accepted of him: *Acts* 10 and 15. And in Like manner un-
till

til the new Doctrine and Law was Reveald; all those who observ'd the second Oeconomy, or the Jews peculiar Law, were of the true Religion: But so soon as God's Revelation came to them, and the new Commands from God, or Renovation of the former Precepts were Reveald, if they do not believe the Truths, nor own the Obligations to Obedience of what's Prescrib'd, they are no longer in the Unity of the true Religion; but all who believe and own Obligation to these superadd'd Truths and Laws, are United in the true Religion.

And albeit any Society or Number shall superadd new Obligations and Assertions not contain'd in the revealed System, providing they be consistent with these that are revealed, and are not a denial of that Faith or Religion, all these continue with the rest, in Union of true Religion, and are in the Catholick Church, and who breaks off from owning a Communion with them, as such, are Schismatics, renting themselves from the Society, which continues in Gods Oeconomy; and this all do so long as they continue in the Profession of believing, own-

owning, and endeavouring the Practice of what God did reveal and command; but to rend Christ's Body, or to disown his beloved, is a terrible Danger.

Note, that here all along is meant the apparent Catholick Church, who by Profession are of the true Religion, albeit the true mystical Spouse, be the true spiritual Member of that Profession, who are sincerely Religious of which Man is not to Judge, but he only who sees the Heart, and knows the Thoughts.

Now this leading us to consider the true Church and the Union and Communion thereof. Let us transferr these Considerations to that Subject.



